

Disaster Loans Available After Bug, Hawk Fires

Churchill and several other Northern Nevada counties are included in a federal disaster declaration, with assistance available for qualifying businesses, nonprofits, and residents.

By Rachel Dahl

Businesses and residents affected by the Bug and Hawk fires may now be eligible for low-interest federal disaster loans through the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

The SBA issued a disaster declaration Sept. 11 covering the fires, which occurred between Aug. 8 and Sept. 9 in Washoe County. The declaration also includes the contiguous Nevada counties of Carson City, Churchill, Humboldt, Lyon, Pershing, and Storey, along with several counties in California and Oregon.

The assistance can cover both physical damage and economic losses tied to the fires.

At an SBA rural business forum held recently in Fallon, officials from the agency's Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience emphasized that disaster assistance extends beyond businesses whose buildings were directly damaged.

Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDLs) can provide working capital to eligible small businesses, small agricultural cooperatives and most private nonprofit organizations that are unable to meet ordinary financial obligations because of the disaster. Those funds are intended to help businesses through the recovery period rather than pay for physical repairs.

That can matter to businesses far beyond the burn area.

A business may suffer economic injury because customers cannot reach it, roads are disrupted, operations are interrupted, employees cannot work, or normal business activity declines because of a disaster.

SBA disaster recovery officials told attendees in Fallon that the agency is intended to work alongside banks and other lenders rather than compete

with them. If a disaster interrupts a business's revenue, SBA assistance may help cover ordinary obligations while the business gets back on its feet.

Under the declaration, EIDLs are available at a fixed interest rate of 4 percent for eligible businesses and small agricultural cooperatives that SBA determines do not have sufficient credit available elsewhere. Private nonprofit organizations may qualify at 3.625 percent.

The deadline to apply for economic-injury assistance is June 11, 2027.

Separate physical-disaster loans are available for qualifying losses to business property, homes and personal property.

Businesses of any size may apply for loans to repair or replace disaster-damaged real estate, inventory, supplies, machinery, and equipment. Private nonprofit organizations, including churches and charities, may

also qualify.

Business disaster loans are generally limited to \$2 million for physical losses. Economic Injury Disaster Loans are also limited to \$2 million, with the combined statutory ceiling generally applying across a business's physical-damage, economic-injury, mitigation, and refinancing assistance for the same disaster. SBA may waive that ceiling in some cases involving a major source of employment.

Homeowners may qualify for up to \$500,000 to repair or replace disaster-damaged real estate and up to \$100,000 to replace damaged personal property.

Interest rates depend on whether SBA determines an applicant can obtain credit elsewhere. For this disaster, rates range from 3 percent to 6 percent for home loans and from 4 percent to 8 percent for business physical-damage loans. Private nonprofit physical-disaster loans carry a 3.625 percent rate. Loan terms may extend as long as 30 years, depending on the borrower's ability to repay.

The deadline to apply for physical-damage assistance is Nov. 10.

Only uninsured or otherwise uncompensated losses are eligible. SBA may also provide additional financing for mitigation improvements designed to reduce damage from future disasters.

Applications can be submitted through the MySBA Loan Portal.

Applicants who need assistance can contact the SBA Disaster Assistance Customer Service Center at 1-800-659-2955 or disastercustomerservice@sba.gov.

For northern Nevada businesses, the important point may be not to assume that disaster assistance is limited to those whose building burned.

A business that remained standing but lost revenue because of the Bug or Hawk fires may also have options.



Photo Courtesy Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District

Rural Business Money Is There.

Finding the Right Door Is the Hard Part.



File Photo

By Rachel Dahl

For a rural business owner, hearing “no” from a bank can sound like the end of the road. However, it may only mean you knocked on the wrong door.

That was one of the clearest takeaways from a federal rural business forum held recently in Fallon, where lenders and small-business advisers laid out a financing system that is broader and more complicated than simply applying for a conventional bank loan.

Andrew Diedrichsen, director of commercial banking for Western Alliance Bank, said banks tend to look backward.

When a borrower asks for a loan, the first question is usually what the business has done over the past several years and whether the cash flow shows the ability to repay the debt.

That works well for an established business with a strong history. It does not always work as well for a startup, a younger company, or a business trying to make a major expansion.

This is where U.S. Small Business

Administration (SBA)-backed loans and rural lending programs can come in.

One of the main programs discussed in Fallon was the SBA 504 loan, designed primarily for commercial real estate, construction, and certain long-term equipment.

Stephanie Morris of Nevada State Development Corporation said the program can allow qualifying businesses to purchase a building with considerably less cash down than a conventional commercial loan may require.

The shorthand is simple: why lease when you can own?

Nevada State Development Corporation works with banks to complete the financing. In a typical transaction, the borrower may contribute around 10 percent, although startups or certain projects may require more.

The program can be used to purchase an existing building, renovate property, build from the ground up, or finance qualifying equipment.

Diedrichsen said that can be the difference between a business continuing to rent and actually owning the property it operates from.

For businesses with different needs, the SBA 7(a) program can be used for a broader range of purposes, including working capital and business acquisitions.

Forum speakers also spent considerable time talking about

“capital stacking,” or using more than one financing source to complete a project.

For example, a business might use one loan to purchase a company and another to purchase the building it operates from. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), SBA, local lenders, and development organizations may also be able to participate in different pieces of the same project.

The important part is that the financing must be structured correctly.

That is why the people in the room kept coming back to the same advice: do not try to figure it all out alone.

Michelle Beecher, lending programs manager for Rural Nevada Development Corporation (RNDC), said the nonprofit has been lending in rural Nevada for nearly 35 years and has put close to \$60 million into rural businesses during that time.

RNDC can finance startups, acquisitions, and expansions, and can also work alongside other lenders.

“If we can’t fit you in here, then often there’s somewhere else that we can,” Beecher said.

For businesses in Churchill County, Sara Beebe-Wolken with the Churchill Entrepreneur Development Association (CEDA) and Nevada Small Business Development Center (SBDC) may be one of the best places to start.

Beebe described her role as the bridge between the business owner and the lender.

CEDA and the SBDC help entrepreneurs get loan-ready, work

through business plans and financials, and determine which lender or program may be the best fit. The counseling is provided at no cost.

Beebe said lenders say even good businesses can stall if financial records are incomplete, ownership documents are inconsistent, or the borrower is not clear about exactly what the money is for.

Buying a building is different from buying inventory, financing equipment is different from acquiring another company, and a startup is different from a business with three years of cash flow.

And one lender saying no does not necessarily mean the project is dead. It may mean the business needs a federal guarantee, a rural lender, more equity, a different loan structure, or simply better preparation.

According to the panel, the financing system is complicated, but the message in Fallon was simple. Start by finding someone who understands the system and tell them what you are trying to build. The money may be there; the hard part is finding the right door.



Panel at the federal rural business forum. Photo Courtesy Rachel Dahl

COMMENTARY

Nevadans Deserve Digital Asset Protections, Not Legal Gray Area

By Mike Wilson

Nevada is built on small businesses, tourism, and a service economy that never really sleeps. For us, digital assets and innovative financial tools aren't a niche curiosity; they've become practical means of getting paid, managing cash flow, and building wealth.

Despite the fact that scores of everyday cryptocurrency users are already embracing digital assets to strive for a better financial future, we lack clear rules of the road to guide our participation and expedite even more technological progress, resulting in needless confusion, inefficiency, and risk.

Now, the U.S. Senate is on the cusp of passing a comprehensive digital asset market structure bill that would update outdated financial industry regulations, unleash a new wave of innovation, and finally give Nevadans the basic consumer protections we have been asking for. We need to hold our officials accountable and make sure it gets done.

The Digital Asset Market Clarity (CLARITY) Act would address the governance no man's land that digital asset developers, businesses, and users operate in. Right now, there is no consistent registration or oversight scheme, no requirements to keep customer funds separate from company funds, no requirements to use a qualified custodian for customer

assets, and no expectation for how customer assets would be treated if a platform fails.

The potential that cryptocurrency has for Americans from all walks of life is incredible, but a platform collapsing and taking Nevadans' assets with it, or scammers vanishing with people's life savings, is unacceptable.

I first got into cryptocurrency because of my personal belief in financial freedom. In the years since, I have come to rely on digital assets for long-term savings, direct transactions, and supporting crypto businesses and creators. As a digital asset educator, my Nevada community includes everyday investors, small-business owners, and many people using crypto for the first time.

Requiring registration, meaningful disclosures, customer-asset segregation, and transparent operations will reduce fraud and conflicts of interest while giving people greater confidence to participate in the digital economy. This is precisely what the folks I work with need, and it's the gap the CLARITY Act fills.

But the demand for a regulatory overhaul goes beyond the important goal of protecting individual consumers. Digital assets represent one of the most promising, rapidly evolving parts of our economy. The CLARITY Act would keep jobs, investment, and innovation in the U.S. instead of pushing them offshore

to countries where clear governing frameworks have already been established. Every week that the Senate delays, our assets are exposed to risk, and technological advancements are put on hold while Washington looks away.

The Silver State's crypto community has already mobilized in support of this legislative solution. Stand With Crypto, the national nonprofit whose Nevada chapter I lead, has a network of more than 40,000 advocates here who have contacted lawmakers more than 16,400 times in the past year in support of the CLARITY Act. We have had one unified message: CLARITY can't wait.

In many ways, the hard part is already done: the bill has been negotiated and passed the House of Representatives. A cloture vote is scheduled for September, when lawmakers return to D.C. After years of uncertainty and months of painstaking bipartisan work, it would be a mistake to let the finish line slip out of reach.

Sens. Catherine Cortez Masto and Jacky Rosen need to be working with their colleagues on both sides of the aisle to clear cloture and pass the bill before this Congress runs out of time. Protecting Nevadans is too important to let this opportunity sail by.

Mike Wilson is president of Stand With Crypto's Nevada chapter and founder of the Vegas Crypto Group.

Veterans, Military Spouses Make Impact

Staff Report

As we celebrate 250 years of American independence and innovation, the Small Business Administration honors the veteran and military spouse entrepreneurs driving our nation's economic growth and making an impact.

Through MySBA certifications, Veterans Business Outreach Centers, and the Made in America Manufacturing Initiative, veterans gain access to tools, training, and networks that fuel entrepreneurial success. Discover how SBA resources can help your #VetBiz thrive at sba.gov/veterans.

Red Shoe Gala



Photo Courtesy Ronald McDonald House Charities Northern Nevada

Staff Report

Ronald McDonald House Charities Northern Nevada invites you to participate in the 40th Anniversary Red Shoe Gala. This year's gala takes place Sept. 19 at the Renaissance Reno Downtown Hotel & Spa.

The gala will feature a fun and nostalgic 1980s Prom theme, bringing the community together for an evening of celebration, impact, and generosity.

Support us through the donation of an auction or raffle item to be featured at this signature event. Contributions will play a vital role in helping raise essential funds to provide comfort, care, and critical resources for families with children receiving medical treatment in Northern Nevada.

Each item donated not only enhances the excitement of our gala but also directly contributes to our mission – ensuring families have a place to stay close to their child, at no cost, when they need it most.

Should you have any questions or need assistance, contact Mui Condon at Mui@RMHCNNevada.org or 775-322-4663, ext. 202.

Veteran Career Employment Team

Staff Report

The Veteran Career Employment Team's new webpage is now available at: https://detr.nv.gov/Page/Veteran_Employment_Services.

The new webpage provides details about the employment services our team can deliver; any individuals who wish to receive services need to complete the short online interest form to get started.

There is also a shared mailbox at veteranemployment@detr.nv.gov that will be monitored to respond to any general questions that candidates might have. The team also provides services to businesses and employers interested in hiring veterans.

Who Still Has Nevada's Attention?

As voters migrate toward podcasts, streaming, and direct sources, Nevada campaigns face a harder question than who has the biggest advertising budget.

By Rachel Dahl

Nevada's 2026 election may test more than candidates, parties, and campaign messages.

It may also test whether the old political communication system still works.

That question surfaced during a recent Nevada Newsmakers conversation between host Sam Shad and Mary Lau, CEO of the Retail Association of Nevada, as a discussion about media coverage turned into a broader examination of how people now get information and how difficult they have become for campaigns to reach.

Shad raised the issue while discussing coverage of Burning Man, arguing that traditional news organizations often emphasize conflict and tragedy while missing the broader story of the communities they cover.

Lau agreed, saying the line between reporting and opinion has become increasingly blurred.

"We stopped being reporters and started being opinion columnists," she said, speaking broadly about what audiences now see from media organizations.

Their conversation quickly moved beyond criticism of traditional media.

Lau said she increasingly gets information from podcasts, citing programs ranging from Joe Rogan to the All-In Podcast. Shad said Nevada Newsmakers has seen the same shift firsthand, with its audio and video podcast audience becoming its fastest-growing segment over roughly the past seven years.

That matters politically because Nevada campaigns are spending millions of dollars trying to reach an electorate whose information habits are changing rapidly.

Later in the program, Shad pointed

to the governor's race between Republican Gov. Joe Lombardo and Democratic Attorney General Aaron Ford and asked whether the campaign could become a test of traditional broadcast advertising against streaming and online media.

Lau said the problem may be bigger than choosing the right platform.

Voters can simply stop listening. "So much of it becomes oversaturation," she said. "After a while you're not going to listen to it anymore."

That creates a difficult environment for campaigns accustomed to defining opponents early, buying television advertising, and repeatedly delivering carefully tested messages.

Nevada's changing voter registration adds another complication.

Shad noted the increasingly important role of nonpartisan voters and questioned whether campaigns are still chasing a relatively small group of persuadable voters or dealing with a fundamentally different electorate.

Lau said the old assumptions about strict partisan voting no longer necessarily hold.

Republicans and Democrats remain closely matched, she said, while a large nonpartisan block includes both potential swing voters and people who may never vote at all.

The real campaign challenge, she said, is determining who is actually motivated to participate and what message will reach them.

Timing is another factor. Lau argued that much of the money spent early in election cycles arrives before many voters are paying attention.

"The race doesn't start until later," she said, when voters begin focusing on candidates and deciding whose

claims they believe.

The discussion points to a larger change underway in Nevada politics.

For decades, campaigns could depend heavily on television, newspapers, radio, and direct mail to reach relatively predictable audiences. Today, voters may get information from a local newspaper, Facebook post, podcast, YouTube interview, streaming advertisement, candidate email, or conversation shared directly by someone they trust, often all in the same day.

That fragmented system gives voters more choices, but it also makes it harder to know which information they trust, and which messages actually reach them.

It may also explain why campaign spending alone tells less of the story than it once did.

A candidate can buy more advertisements without necessarily buying more attention.

And as Nevada moves deeper into the 2026 campaign, attention may be one of the most valuable, and difficult to measure, commodities in politics.

The race will still be about candidates, policies, and turnout, but it is also about something more basic: Who is still listening?



File Photo

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EVENTS

Forget the Pumpkin Spice: Nevada’s Serving Something Stronger

Travel across the state to catch an event!



Photo Courtesy Elko Skyfair

By Doris Rodriguez

Hey Nevada!

All right, we can’t really forget pumpkin spice, I only said it to get you to look up from the cup. But it worked, and you’re still here, so I’m calling it a win.

Bring your favorite cozy fall drink and head to Schurz from Sept. 17-20 for the Walker River Paiute Tribe’s Pinenut Festival, where families, friends, and entire communities gather around tradition and laughter.

Thursday begins with a pageant in the tribal gym at 6 p.m. Friday brings stick games and a talent show, as well as the first powwow Grand Entry at 7 p.m. under the arbor.

Saturday holds the heart of the

gathering. The Show & Shine will be held at the Tribal Administration lot from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., featuring a car contest and parade. Games and competitions will take place as well, including horseshoes, kids’ games, stick games, a cradleboard contest, arm wrestling, and boxing.

A community barbecue will be held at noon in the park, and the pinenut blessing will be held at 8 p.m. at the announcer stand. Vendors close during the blessing so the ceremony can be held without interruption. Grand Entry also returns to the arbor at 1 and 7 p.m.

Sunday continues with a fun run in the park, a powwow, and more stick games. Yes, camping will be available, and the tribal gymnasium will be open for showers. Join the circle and allow the magic of the Pinenut Festival to pull you in.

Way out east, Elko wakes up to a sky full of magic. Grab your hot cider as the Ruby Mountain Balloon Festival floats in Sept. 18-20; this is no ordinary sunrise.

On Friday night, burners boom and the balloons glow, turning the park into a lantern-lit air show. On Saturday, the Elko Skyfair takes over the airport with dawn launches, airplanes lined up like iron eagles, and breakfast on the go courtesy

of the Civil Air Patrol. Downtown, the “Balloons and Bubbly” walk keeps the party rolling. You can even dress like a balloon if the spirit moves you.

Go ahead and top off your coffee, because Dayton is wide awake and buzzing. From Sept. 19-20, Dayton Valley Days spills out over Historic Main and Pike, the heart of Nevada’s oldest settlement. Saturday starts at 8:30 a.m. and runs until 5 p.m. The event will also feature a car show from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Sunday is the same drill, with closing time a smidge earlier at 4 p.m. Admission? Free. The pet parade will strut through around 10 a.m. Sunday on Pike Street.

Sunday’s Run for the Gold 5K leaves the dirt lot on Cemetery Road at 7:30 a.m., and cuts through Old Town, on the same ground that kicked off Nevada’s gold rush. Walk it or run it, just don’t miss out. You’ll find more than 150 vendors slinging everything from fry bread to trinkets, food trucks, live music, and a kids’ zone.

Now, pour yourself another hot drink, because our final stop is Eureka, Sept. 19, for the Dig Deep Backroads Run. The morning starts early and takes off from the Eureka Fairgrounds at 8 a.m. Runners have their pick: a 5K, 10K, or a “15K-ish.”

Vendors will set up at Veteran’s Park at 10 a.m. Free tunnel tours take you under Main Street at 11 a.m., 1:30 p.m., 2:30 p.m., and 3 p.m., with a limit of 15 people per tour. Live music will fill the park from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., with The Desert Renegades on the main stage, plus sets at the Jackson House balcony, Lani & Repetto Hall, and the Opera House.

A wine walk kicks off at 1 p.m. at 180 Gallery, where the route then winds past the Opera House, the Sentinel Museum, and the Jackson House.

Additionally, the Golden Ticket raffle runs from 5 to 6 p.m. for \$50 per ticket, and a barbecue in the park starts at 5 p.m. for \$15 a plate. At 6 p.m., The Dead Frets take the Veteran’s Park main stage.

Save the couch for winter hibernation! That sofa isn’t going anywhere, and neither are the reruns. The good times, on the other hand, won’t wait, and neither will the good parking.

Check start times and tickets before you leave the driveway. Grab your favorite fall drink, rally your crew, and get out there! Nevada’s autumn adventures are waiting, and you won’t want to miss out.

Safe travels!

Great Reno Balloon Race Celebrates 45th Anniversary

By Sydney Trainor

Color filled the skies above Reno on Thursday and Saturday as pilots took flight for the 45th annual Great Reno Balloon Race, despite high winds that grounded the balloons for two of the four scheduled days.

The event ran Thursday, Sept. 10, through Sunday, Sept. 13, at Rancho San Rafael Regional Park. Final competition results were posted Sunday, with Justin Wilkinson taking first place in Upgrade!, followed by Michael Stone in Orange! and Pat Irwin in Battle Born.

The Great Reno Balloon Race is the world’s largest free hot air ballooning event, drawing pilots from Nevada, Utah, California, Arizona, and Massachusetts.

Thursday morning began with the early-morning Super Glow Show. Crowds gathered in the fields at 5 a.m. to watch balloons perform a coordinated glowing display. Following the show, seven balloons launched at 5:30 a.m. for Dawn Patrol.

Dawn Patrol pilots must be highly skilled because they fly at dawn when atmospheric conditions can change

dramatically as the sun rises. The 2026 Dawn Patrol included Curt Bramble flying Eagle, Greg Lindsey piloting Floating Awaysis, Ron Thornton flying Peanuts 4Ever, Tim Taylor flying DEE IV, Dana Thornton flying Free Spirit, Sheldon Grauberger flying Rose, and Shelena Shamo piloting Plaid Pixie.

Mass Ascension began at 7 a.m., kicking off the competition. During the Great Reno Balloon Race, pilots compete to see how closely they can reach designated targets throughout Reno. Pilots navigate toward physical targets, then drop a beanbag and try to land it as close to the target as possible.

Digital targets are also used, allowing balloonists to drop a virtual marker instead of a beanbag. Scores are based on how close each marker lands to its target, with the closest distances earning the highest scores.

Although the balloons are a peaceful sight from the ground, piloting one is no easy task. Pilots typically have crews that help set up, take down, and chase the balloons around Reno. Because balloons travel with the wind, chase crews must be prepared to follow them wherever they go. Crew members use radios to communicate



Dawn Patrol prepared to launch. Courtesy of Sydney Trainor

with pilots and coordinate with them as they prepare to land.

Hot air balloons do not have conventional steering systems, so pilots must rely on wind currents to change direction. Wind speed and direction vary at different elevations, allowing pilots to change course by raising or lowering the balloon.

Pilots use burners fueled by propane tanks in the basket to heat the air inside the balloon, causing it to rise. To descend, pilots use ropes to open vents in the balloon, releasing hot air and lowering its altitude.

The Great Reno Balloon Race began in 1982 with 20 hot air balloons. The event now brings up to 100 balloons to Reno each year, filling the Nevada sky with color.



Carried Away Balloon lit up during the Glow Show. Photo Courtesy Sydney Trainor



Dawn Patrol pilots flew in a cluster formation. Courtesy of Sydney Trainor



The sun rose behind Beach Ball, piloted by Stanley Robertson. Courtesy of Sydney Trainor



An aerial view showed Good Morning Sunshine, piloted by William Vavra. Courtesy of Sydney Trainor

LEGISLATIVE

Nevada Seeks Input on Education Plan

By Sydney Trainor

The Nevada Department of Education is accepting public comment through Oct. 21 on a proposed five-year plan intended to improve student outcomes and strengthen coordination across the state’s education system.

The draft Statewide Plan for the Improvement of Pupils, or STIP, was presented Sept. 9 during a meeting of the Nevada State Board of Education. Nevadans are encouraged to review the plan and provide feedback before the public-comment period closes.

The department organized the plan around five strategic priorities and added annual goals, strategies, performance measures, and targets for each.

“In my first 100 days, I traveled across Nevada, visiting schools and meeting with students, educators, trustees, and district leaders. I heard a consistent message: we need greater clarity about where we are headed and how we get there,” said Victor Wakefield, state superintendent of public instruction. “This plan responds to that call. It establishes a clear direction for what we want students to experience every day and a focused plan for how we will work together to deliver better outcomes. Now, we are asking Nevadans to help us make that plan stronger.”

The plan’s five strategic priorities are Strong Foundations, Empowering Pathways, Equipped Educators and Leaders, Informed and Connected Families, and Aligned Systems.

According to the department, “these priorities support a vision that every day, Nevada students are building knowledge of the world, engaging with grade-level content and instruction, solving complex problems, and making progress toward their postsecondary goals.”

Progress would be measured by evaluating pre-K access, student proficiency, graduation rates, Advanced and College and Career Ready diplomas, participation in advanced or career-focused coursework, teacher qualifications and retention, and the amount of time educators spend on instruction instead of reporting tasks. Student-achievement data would also be separated by demographic groups to help identify performance gaps.

Required under Nevada law, the revised STIP establishes statewide goals and measures for improving student outcomes. Senate Bill 460, approved during the 2025 legislative session, directed the department to prepare and annually review the five-year plan in consultation with the State Board of Education, school districts, and other education boards, commissions, and councils.

The legislation also established the Nevada District Performance Framework, which evaluates whether districts are taking the actions within their control to help schools and students succeed and whether those efforts are working.

Department information presented at the meeting shows that the framework considers effective district practices, district-support indicators,

school outcomes, and student outcomes. Effective district practices would not be scored but would provide a common set of expectations for districts.

District-support indicators would evaluate whether schools have classrooms staffed by properly licensed and endorsed teachers, whether districts are using approved, evidence-based reading and math materials, and whether students are enrolling in qualifying college- and career-readiness courses. The framework would also measure districts’ financial stability and whether Title I schools have equitable access to qualified educators.

The framework would provide district-support and school-outcome scores. Those scores would be combined to give each district an overall Level 1, Level 2, or Level 3 rating. The ratings are intended to show how well districts support schools and students, identify areas that need improvement, and help determine what assistance the department may need to provide.

Beginning with the 2026-27 cycle, districts receiving the lowest ratings for multiple years could be designated as focus districts. Continued underperformance could lead to a priority-district designation.

Focus districts could be required to develop improvement plans and receive technical assistance from the department. Priority districts could face increased state support and oversight, including additional monitoring or the appointment of a state monitor. At the time of the Sept.

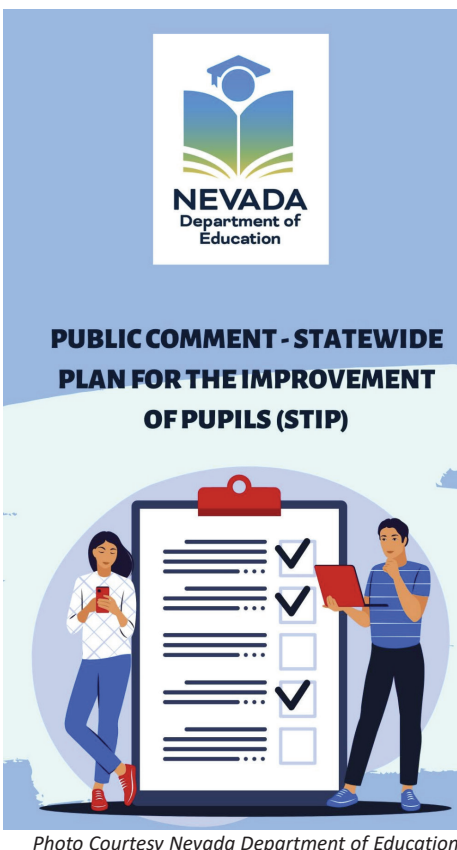


Photo Courtesy Nevada Department of Education

9 meeting, the department had not finalized the support or oversight that focus and priority districts would receive.

After the public-comment period closes, the department will review the feedback and revise the proposal. The final STIP is expected to be presented to the State Board of Education and submitted to the governor in November.

The draft plan and information about submitting comments are available at doe.nv.gov.

Nevada Expands School Accountability as New Test Scores Are Released

By Rachel Dahl

Nevada families have long been able to see how individual schools are performing.

Now the state is beginning to grade the school districts responsible for them, too.

The Nevada Department of Education released its latest student achievement and school performance results this week while rolling out a new Nevada District Performance Framework, a system designed to measure how well districts are supporting student success and to identify problems before they become entrenched.

The change comes from Senate Bill 460, passed by the Legislature in 2025 and signed by Gov. Joe Lombardo. The law strengthens Nevada’s existing school accountability system and creates a new layer of district accountability that could eventually lead to state intervention when districts repeatedly fail to improve.

“Accountability starts with a shared vision for student success, clear expectations for what strong schools and districts do to enable that success, and accessible information about our progress,” Superintendent of Public Instruction Victor Wakefield said.

The statewide academic results continue to show a mixed picture.

On the 2025-26 Smarter Balanced assessments, 45.2 percent of Nevada students in grades three through eight

were proficient in English language arts, down 0.4 percentage points from the previous year.

Math showed a modest improvement, with 36.2 percent of students proficient, an increase of 0.8 percentage points.

Science results varied by grade level. Elementary proficiency was 17.4 percent, down slightly from the previous year. Middle school science proficiency fell 3.1 percentage points to 33.4 percent, while high school science improved 3.4 percentage points to 26.5 percent.

The results also show Nevada remains well short of some of the goals established by the State Board of Education.

Third-grade English proficiency is currently 15.6 percentage points below the board’s goal of 60 percent proficiency by the 2030-31 school year. Eighth-grade mathematics proficiency is 12.1 percentage points below the board’s 40 percent goal.

School performance is also measured through Nevada’s familiar one- through five-star rating system.

For 2025-26, 14.2 percent of Nevada schools received five stars, while 13.8 percent received four stars and 18.8 percent received three.

At the lower end, 25.5 percent of schools received two stars and 18.8 percent received one star.

Eleven schools statewide gained at least two stars this year. Among the rural schools making that list

were Goldfield Elementary School in Esmeralda County, McDermitt Junior High School in Humboldt County and Lund Elementary School in White Pine County.

The more significant change, however, may be happening at the district level.

For the first time, the state is using the Nevada District Performance Framework to assess the districts and charter school sponsors responsible for providing schools with staffing, resources, instructional support and administrative systems.

The first ratings establish a baseline and carry no formal consequences.

Three districts were rated Level 1, meaning they did not meet performance expectations. Twelve were rated Level 2, indicating intermediate performance, and three were rated Level 3, meaning they exceeded expectations.

Churchill County School District – 2
Eureka County School District – 3
Humboldt County School District – 2
Lander County School District – 1
Lyon County School District – 2
Pershing County School District – 2

Beginning with results from the 2026-27 school year, the framework will add specific student outcomes, including early literacy, middle school mathematics, high school graduation and advanced diploma attainment. Districts will also select an additional

student outcome to measure.

Districts that fail to meet expectations may be designated low-performing. Beginning in fall 2028, a district that has been rated low-performing for two consecutive years could be designated an underperforming, or “Priority,” district and become subject to additional state oversight and intervention.

The Department of Education says the intent is not simply to attach another label to schools or districts, but to identify problems earlier, direct additional resources where they are needed and study schools and districts that are producing strong results.

That distinction matters in rural Nevada, where district size, staffing shortages, transportation, enrollment, teacher recruitment and the realities of operating small schools can look very different from conditions in Clark or Washoe counties.

The statewide numbers provide the broad picture.

The more important question for rural communities is what those numbers look like at home.

Next week, each Great Basin Sun community publication will take a closer look at its own schools and district – including individual school star ratings, district performance, areas of improvement and decline, and what local administrators say the results mean for students in the coming year.

2025-2026 Nevada At a Glance

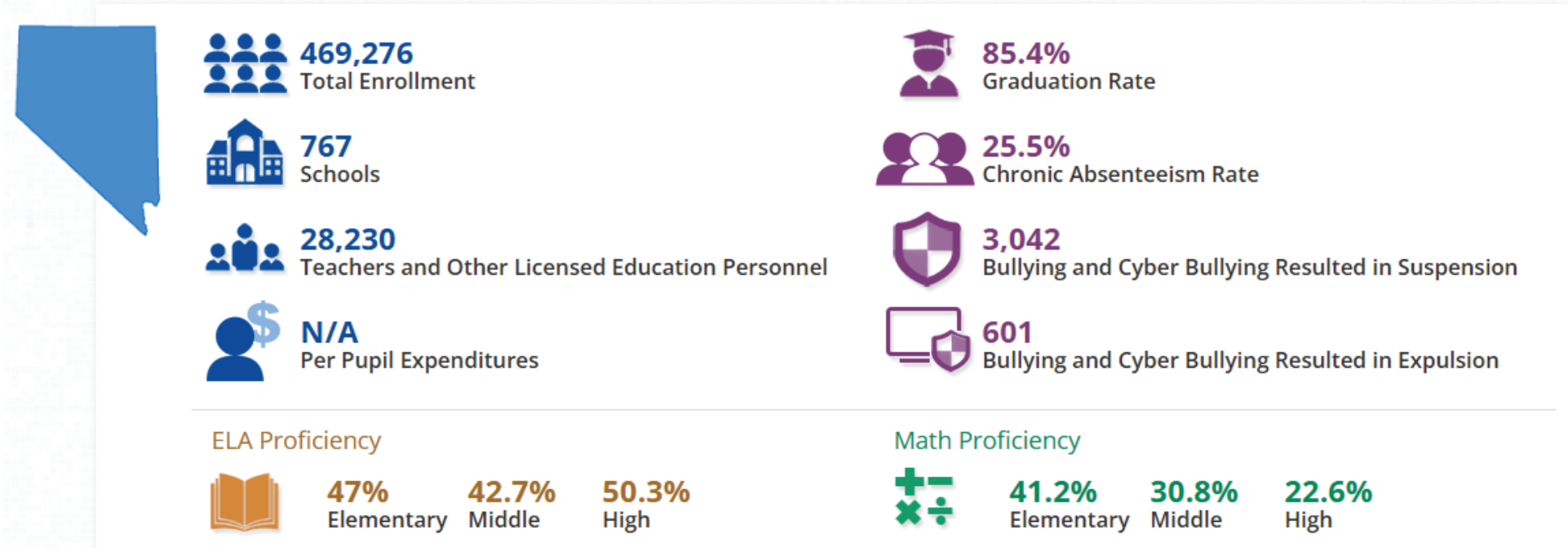


Photo Courtesy Nevada Report Card